# so lovable but just troubled

richietosier (forestjoshua)

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*Richie thinks about it, how all the other Losers had someone. Beverly's dad had been all messed up, but now she had her aunt who truly cared about her. Eddie's mom loved him in her own weird way. Stan's dad may be strict, but he was loving, and his mom adored the boy. Bill's parents had been distant since Georgie's death, but they'd probably care if their other son went missing. Ben had a loving mother. Mike had his grandfather.*

*"No one loves me," Richie whispers.*

# so lovable but just troubled

**Author's Note:**

took me long enough... *throws richie angst at you*

hmu on tumblr

He hears the door slam downstairs, so loud it startles him.

Richie is sitting at the windowsill in his room. The window is open to let out the cigarette smoke, and Richie is dangling his other leg outside, feeling the cool wind brush against his bare toes.

“Richie!” his father’s voice, angry and annoyed, calls from downstairs.

“Shit!” Richie says to himself, and quickly throws the cigarette out of the window and hides his pack and lighter in his pocket. He really thinks his father wouldn’t mind him smoking, but Richie *knows* he would find an excuse to blame Richie of stealing *his* cigarettes.

Richie isn’t that stupid. He wouldn’t dare to steal from his father. He steals from everyone else – older kids at school or people standing in the line for movies. Once he tried to steal from Beverly, but she was too clever and caught him right away.

“What?” Richie says as his father swings the door to his room open. He looks pissed.

“What are you doing?” he asks, gaze darting around the room, as if he knows Richie is hiding something from him.

“Nothing,” Richie spits, and his father squints at him.

“Where’s your mother?” he asks, taking a few steps towards Richie.

“I don’t know,” Richie says, annoyance growing. His mother doesn’t care about him, so he doesn’t care about his mother in turn. “Probably getting more booze,” Richie mumbles, rolling his eyes.

“Don’t speak to me like that,” Wentworth Tozier says, and shoves Richie lightly, so that he really have to grip the side of the window frame to prevent himself from falling.

With that, his father leaves, walking back downstairs. Richie listens to his slow footsteps echo from the staircase. He hears the fridge opening, and his father turning on the TV.

Richie’s heart is pounding. He hops off the windowsill, and runs his fingers through his messy curls. He suddenly can’t stand staying in this house even a second longer.

He grabs a sweatshirt from the floor, because it’s really starting to get chilly outside these days. He checks that his cigarettes haven’t fallen out of his pocket, and then he tiptoes down the stairs, across the hall, and opens the front door as carefully as possible. He doesn’t want to draw his father’s attention, even though his father probably won’t care where Richie is going.

He’s probably just glad that Richie is gone, out of the way.

Richie’s bike is laying on the front lawn, unlocked for anyone to pick up. It’s a miracle it hasn’t been stolen by anyone, not even the bullies that chase Richie and his friends around the town, shouting insults and threats.

*Where can I go?* Richie ponders as he cycles down the street into the quiet autumn evening in Derry, Maine.

He rides past Bill’s house, Eddie’s, Stan’s, Ben’s, Bev’s… He could show up on the doorstep of any of them, asking if they want to spend some time with the miserable Trashmouth, and they’d probably agree.

It’s completely different thing if they want to. If they’re just being polite, agreeing because they don’t dare to turn him down. If they just pity him.

Richie cycles deeper into the night that is growing darker. He considers to ride all the way to where Mike lives, but think it’s too embarrassing to just show up there, unannounced.

He winds up at the Quarry instead, approaching the edge off the cliff as he lights the tenth cigarette of the day.

*You'll get cancer if you keep smoking those!* Eddie's voice scolds him, but Richie still takes another drag. He and Beverly always just roll their eyes at Eddie's threats.

He sits down of the edge, and stares up to the cloudless sky. Richie isn't scared of cancer.

*Grey lumps start to grow in your lungs, my Mom told me, she said that they clog up your lungs until you can't breathe and you'll suffocate to death!* Eddie frantic voice continues. Richie lights another one.

He remembers Eddie swatting a cigarette off Beverly's dainty fingers. *You'll die! I don't want you to die!* But he had let Richie smoke. Richie guessed Eddie didn't mind Richie dying.

Familiar giggles echoing from somewhere interrupt Richie's dark thoughts. He lifts his head up, glancing around, trying to locate the noise. The giggles are joined by speech, and Richie realizes the sounds are coming down from the water.

He stretches his neck to see who's there. As he had already guessed, he spots Beverly, laughing on Ben's shoulders. They are accompanied by Stan and Mike.

Even though Bill and Eddie are absent too, Richie feels a sting in his heart. That Bill and Eddie aren't there – that can be explained. Ever since Georgie died Bill sometimes likes to sulk alone, and Eddie's mom probably wouldn't let him go swimming when it's this cold. But Richie – he can see it. He can see it so clearly, the four of them riding past his house, Mike leading them, Stan in his trail, then Ben with Beverly sitting on the back of his bike, her long arms around Ben.

"Do you think be should invite Trashmouth with us?" he can almost hear Mike saying.

"No," he can hear Stan answering, "I'm not in the mood for listening to his blabbers."

He can hear Ben and Beverly laughing. He can see them continuing

their way to the Quarry, happier without him.

That's just the way he imagines it. It's probably not true, his mind is just playing with him, but it *could* be true. And it crushes him.

Richie throws his cigarette down in the water. He thinks for a minute whether he should throw himself after it, surprise his friends, but he doesn't want to ruin their lovely evening.

He stands and turns around. Takes his bike, and rides home. His parents are fighting again, and Richie sneaks past them up to his room, where he buries himself under the covers, drowning in self-hatred.

When he's almost falling asleep, finally succeeding to ignore his parents' shouts, the phone starts ringing.

It rings, and rings, and *rings*, and it doesn't stop. No one is picking it up, so growing frustrated, Richie throws off his covers and marches into the corridor, grabbing the phone.

"Hello, this is Richie," he says in a flat tone.

"Richie? It's Eddie," Eddie's voice comes, and Richie instantly feels slightly better. Not good, not good at all, but better.

"What's up, Eddie Spaghetti?" Richie says, trying to sound cheery.

Eddie sighs in annoyance. Richie suspects he doesn't hate the nicknames Richie calls him as much as he claims to. "My mom, she's really…"

"Being a bitch? That's because she misses me," Richie says.

"Shut up, Richie," Eddie says sharply, "Anyway, would you like to meet up somewhere? I really can't stand her right now…"

The thing is – Richie really enjoys Eddie's company. Even though it may be unfair, out of all his six friends Richie likes Eddie the best.

He likes Eddie so much he might even *love him.*

Scratch that, he *does.* He loves Eddie, he knows that deep in his heart, but it's better for him to ignore it. Better for Eddie, too. Eddie deserves so much better.

Besides, boys shouldn't love other boys. Not in Derry, at least.

Just hearing Eddie's breathing makes Richie's heart hammer. He really should spend less time with Eddie. Maybe the feelings would eventually disappear.

"Richie?" says Eddie.

"I'm too tired, Eddie," Richie says quickly. His parents have gone silent, and Richie hears his father's approaching steps. "Not tonight."

"But…" Eddie argues.

"Bye, Eddie. Ask Bill," Richie says hesitantly, and hangs up. He runs to his room and dives under the covers, hands shaking. A second later, his father opens the door.

"Who called?" he asks Richie.

"Just Eddie," Richie says.

"Eddie who?"

"Eddie Kaspbrak. My friend."

His father is quiet for a moment, but doesn't leave. "Is he the one who's brother died?"

"No. That's Bill." *Please, leave.*

His father grunts, then closes the door.

Richie wipes away a stray tear from his face and realizes he's still wearing his glasses. He takes them off, sets them on the nightstand.

The phone starts ringing again.

"Yes?" Richie hears his father answer. A pause. "Richie's gone to sleep." Another pause. Then, "Stop calling us, Edward."

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“Is everything alright, Rich?”

Richie has been sitting in the school cafeteria for a couple of minutes, alone at the table which the Losers usually occupy. He’s drowning in his thoughts, doodling in his notebook when Eddie and Stan arrive.

They both have worried eyes as they wait for Richie to answer. Richie sees Stan’s gaze shift to his notebook, and Richie quickly turns it over. Stan – nor Eddie – does not need to see the embarrassing shit Richie had written all over it.

*Richie + Eddie. Eddie + Richie. Richie + Eddie. Eddie + Richie.*

“Richie?” Eddie inquires, taking a seat next to him and touching Richie’s arm gently.

“Yeah, I’m fine!” Richie insist, “Just tired, that’s all, I swear.”

“You don’t seem like yourself,” says Stan who’s now sitting opposite Richie. There’s something in his eyes. *Maybe he saw what I had written,* Richie thinks. He suddenly feels nervous, and looks away from Stan.

“You sounded off on the phone last night,” Eddie states. To Richie’s horror, he scoots closer and places his hand on Richie’s forehead, sweeping his hair aside with almost caress-like motion. “Are you sick?”

“No, Eddie,” Richie complains, grabbing Eddie’s wrist and pushing his hand away. “I swear I’m okay!”

Eddie and Stan don’t get to bother Richie any further since Bill, Beverly and Ben arrive.

“Hi! What’s going on?” Beverly asks, placing herself next to Stan and setting her lunchbox on the table. Ben sits right next to her, and Bill

next to Eddie.

“Richie-“ Eddie begins, but Richie interrupts him by asking Beverly,

“Bev, do you have any cigarettes? I’ve run out, and haven’t got hold of any new ones yet.”

Beverly rolls her eyes and opens her lunchbox, taking out a pack of cigarettes. She tosses two over the table to Richie, who smoothly catches them. As he’s putting the cigarettes in his pocket, he notices Eddie pouting disapprovingly – and adorably – at him.

“R- Richie, wh- where’s your lunch?” Bill asks as the others start eating.

Richie squirms. The truth is – he had looked into the fridge and the kitchen cabinets this morning, and seen only beer cans. Her mom thought of cooking maybe once a month. She went to the store and brought snacks regularly, but Richie the last proper meal Richie had eaten had been when he had stayed over at Stan’s a couple weeks ago. He lived off candy bars and cheap sandwiches.

Of course he couldn’t tell that to his friends. So he just shrugged, and said, as he always did,

“I forgot to take some with me.”

“Don’t you have any lunch money?” Ben asks, frowning. Richie just shakes his head, feeling his cheeks go red with shame.

And as always, Bill hands half of his sandwich to Richie. “Come on, t- take it,” he said, “You n- need f- f- food.”

“Yeah, dude,” Stan says, handing over part of his bread as well, “You’re skin and bones.”

Eddie gives him half of his apple. Beverly gives him her juicebox, and Ben a candy bar.

“You don’t need to,” Richie says, but secretly, he was thankful. He has been hungry since yesterday evening and has been building up courage to ask his father some lunch money for tomorrow. If Richie

was humble enough, his dad usually tossed him a few coins and told him to get out of his sight.

“How could you be so forgetful?” Eddie says in a lighter tone, elbowing Richie gently, “This is like the seventh time this month… Not that I keep count.”

Stan snorts at that, and Richie feels a smile tugging up the corners of his lips.

“Aw, Eddie Spaghetti! Don’t worry, I’m always just too busy to get to your mom that I forget I have eat something other than her,” Richie says.

“Gross!” Eddie exclaims.

“Beep beep, Richie,” says Beverly.

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Mike is waiting for them in front of the school, with a bright smile on his face.

“Did you have fun at school?” he asks, reaching over to ruffle Richie’s hair.

“Did you have fun shoveling sheep shit?” Richie shoots back.

“No, I was taking care of the kittens,” Mike says.

“Kittens?” Beverly gasps, and Ben and Stan’s eyes light up.

“Yup,” Mike says, “We have seven of them. Their mother died.”

“That’s sad,” Eddie comments.

“Would you like to come over and take a look at them?” Mike suggests.

“Definitely!” Beverly and Bill reply in unison.

They all hop on their bikes, racing to the farm where Mike lives. Mike is of course first there – he knows all the shortcuts and is pretty fast in general. Beverly and Stan are right behind him, then Eddie, who pedals furiously, trying to catch up with Beverly. Richie stays behind with Ben and Bill – they’re talking about an upcoming movie they want to see. Richie thinks it sounds kind of interesting, but they probably wouldn’t ask him to tag along. Nobody wants Richie with them in the movies, making unnecessary comments.

The kittens reside in one of the barns. It takes lot of convincing for Eddie to actually get in there, but once Stan follows them all, so does Eddie.

“They are so cute!” Beverly exclaims, kneeling on the hay-covered floor to pick up one of the mewling kittens. Ben follows right next to her and also takes one. There’s indeed seven of them – so small, all different colors. Beverly’s kitten is light brown and Ben’s is white like snow.

“Do they have names?” Beverly asks. She looks adorable cuddling a kitten, hay stuck in her hair.

“This one is called Pascal,” Mike says, picking up a gray one that was licking his paws on top of a bale of hay.

“That’s a dumb name for a kitten,” Richie says.

“Beep beep, Richie,” answers Mike, rolling his eyes. “The others don’t have names.”

Richie approaches the kittens, getting on his knees in front of Ben and Beverly. He catches a kitten with brown stripes, and lifts him in his lap.

“Can we name them?” Beverly requests.

“Sure,” says Mike, and sits on top of the bale of hay. Richie marvels his kitten’s small paws. Bill comes to sit next to him, and picks up a black kitten.

“Mike, hold up the kitten,” Stan says. He’s taken out the polaroid camera his parents gave him as birthday present, and takes a picture of Mike smiling with Pascal. He turns the camera to Richie next, and Richie sticks out his tongue as Stan snaps a picture. He slides the camera and the photos into his backpack, and sits is next to Ben, grabbing a black and white kitten.

Eddie is still standing further away from them, eyeing them nervously as if the kittens could devour them any given moment.

“What’s the matter, Eds?” asks Richie, “There’s still one kitten left.”

“You know, I’m just trying to avoid the diseases. Mike, are you really sure they don’t have fleas?” says Eddie.

Mike laughs. “I’m pretty sure they don’t?”

“You can’t get a disease from a kitten,” Stan scoffs.

“Are you sure?” Eddie says, still eyeing the kittens cautiously, “Because my mom…”

“Who gives a s-shit what your mom thinks?” Bill says, and Eddie closes his mouth. He takes a few steps forward, but still doesn’t join them.

“Guys!” Beverly interrupts, “We have to come up with names for them?”

“Let’s each n-name one,” Bill suggests.

“I’m going to call mine Cookie,” Beverly states, kissing the kitten in between her small ears. Eddie shrieks,

“Bev! Don’t put your mouth on it!”

“Eddie, come on,” Ben complains.

“What’s yours called?” Stan asks Ben.

“Mildred,” says Ben after a moment of pondering.

“That’s a bullshit name for a kitten!” Richie says.

“S-She d-doesn’t really l-look like a M-Mildred,” Bill comments.

“Let him call her Mildred. Millie for short,” Beverly says and smiles at Ben. “How about yours, Richie?”

Richie smirks. He has an idea. “Eddie,” he says smugly.

“Do *not* name the kitten after me!” Eddie says, crossing his skinny arms.

“Why not? It reminds me of you. No, *you* remind me of a kitten.”

“*Richie.”*

“Fine, I’ll name it after your mom, then.”

“It’s a boy kitten,” Mike says.

“Names have no gender,” Richie dismisses him.

“Do *not!”* Eddie fumes. Richie lifts the kitten up and looks into its brown eyes.

“I guess I could name him Stan,” he says after a moment of thinking.

“Fine by me,” Stan shrugs.

“Alright. Stan it is. Stan the kitten.” Beverly and Bill giggle at that, but Stan just rolls his eyes. “What’s your kitten going to be called? You could name it Eddie!”

“Mine’s called Cinnamon,” Stan says, “It’s a girl, I can’t name her Eddie. Besides, she’s just the color of cinnamon.”

“You s-sure you don’t want to call yours S-snowball?” Bill says to Ben.

“What’s yours called?” Ben asks.

“G-g-georgie,” Bill says, and everyone goes quiet for a while, until Eddie finally marches over to them and picks up the final kitten.

“This one is called Trashmouth,” Eddie declares.

“Aw, Eds!” Richie says, feeling suddenly warm. “I remind you of a kitten?” Eddie just glares at him. He looks adorable with a kitten in his arms.

“Mike, can I please keep Cookie?” Beverly begs, pressing more kisses on the kitten’s head.

“She’s yours,” Mike promises, and Beverly’s face breaks into huge grins, so that Ben blushes when he glances at her.

“Can I keep mine, too?” Stan asks, to all their surprise. “My parents don’t want to buy me a bird, but maybe I can convince them to let me keep a kitten.”

“Of course you can!” Mike says, and Stan smiles at him.

“You know, Stan, cats eat birds,” Richie states, tickling Stan the kitten’s nose with a hay.

“I know that, Richie. You know, humans do too.”

“What?” huffs Richie, confused.

“Ch-chickens, Richie! And t-turkey!” Bill says, and nudges Richie.

“Oh,” says Richie, “I didn’t think of them as birds.”

Stan groans.

--

Richie is sitting alone in the Barrens, smoking and thinking of Eddie Kaspbrak.

He’s allowing himself that, now. He had tried *not* thinking about Eddie, shoving him away from his mind every time that lovely appeared in his thoughts. It wasn’t just Eddie’s face that appealed to

Richie – it was Eddie as a whole.

The shorts he wore. His two fanny packs. The way he clutched his inhaler in distress, knowing that it was bullshit but still keeping it because it brought him comfort. They way he'd rant about bacteria and illnesses. His kindness and bravery, and certain innocence. The way he quipped. His laugh. His worried eyes whenever some of the Losers were feeling down, even when *Richie* was feeling down.

And Richie *did* feel down often these days. Hell, he'd mostly felt down all his life – he had just gotten good at covering it, with offensive jokes and blabbering mouth. Sometimes, he just *couldn't* stop. That's why he was in the barrens alone right now. Because his mother had gotten tired of him.

"*Shut up,* Richie! You're so goddamn annoying!" she had slurred, grabbing his wrist and shoving him out of the front door.

Richie stares at his sore wrist which is starting to bruise. He drops the butt of his cigarettes in the grass, and rubs his wrist gently. He needs an ice pack, maybe, otherwise it's going to hurt for a long time.

Checking that his lighter hasn't fallen out of his pocket, Richie stands up, letting the cigarette ash fall from his lap. He doesn't get far till he hears fast paced footstep approaching, footsteps he would recognize anywhere…

It's Eddie Kaspbrak striding towards him in all his shortness.

"Richie!" he says, sounding almost… pleased? "I've been looking for you everywhere. Your mom didn't know where you were." Eddie frowns, and Richie freezes. That can only mean that Eddie had actually went by his house and asked for Richie, witnessing his mother in all her drunken glory. Luckily, Eddie doesn't comment it further, continuing, "I went to look for you in the arcade, but you weren't there and none of the others knew either…"

"I don't have any money, Eds," Richie says.

"Stop calling me Eds. Why are you sulking here alone?"

"None of your business!"

“Well, it kind of is… You *are* my best fried, see,” Eddie says with shrug, coming closer to Richie. “Were you smoking again?” he asks, kicking the cigarette butt on the ground. “You’re going to get cancer, and then...”

“I will suffocate to death. I know, Eddie.” Richie rolls his eyes, but Eddie’s face is serious. He’s not staring at directly Richie, and his eyes are worried.

“Your wrist…” Eddie says quietly. Richie quickly pulls the sleeve of his shirt down, but Eddie grabs him by his elbow, and pulls the sleeve down to inspect the injury. “How did you get this?” Eddie asks, setting his fingers gently on the bruises. The touch almost burns Richie, not that it hurts, but it’s *Eddie* touching him, so carefully as if he’s afraid Richie will shatter.

He’s so close Richie could count his eyelashes, and freckles too.

Richie’s mouth is suddenly dry.

“Richie?” Eddie inquires. His thumb actually *caresses* over Richie’s wrist, making Richie’s heartbeat speed up.

“I-“ Richie has lost all his words. He’s sure he’s starting to stutter like Bill. “I accidentelly slammed a car door on it.”

Eddie looks at the wrist. “Bullshit,” he states, “That wouldn’t leave a bruise like this. These are finger-shaped. We you attacked again?”

*No, it was just my mom,* Richie wants to say, but he doesn’t. He couldn’t. What would Eddie say then? What would he do?

*Maybe, if you weren’t so annoying, she would…* Eddie’s voice says in Richie’s head.

She would what? Love him?

Suddenly, tears burn Richie’s eyes. He blinks rapidly, willing himself not to let them fall, and pulls his hand away from Eddie’s loose grip.

“No, it’s nothing, Eddie Spaghetti,” Richie lies, offering Eddie a weak but convincing smile.

The moment is broken, and Eddie is pouting. “Could you stop that? Seriously?”

“Stop what?” Richie frowns.

“Calling me ‘Eddie Spaghetti’,” Eddie spits out the nickname like it’s venom, “Or Eds, or *cute*, or anything.”

“But, Eddie,” Richie says, lost. *I thought you liked it. Even though you say you hate them, I could see that those nicknames made you smile. And making you smile is my everything.*

“And while we’re on it, stop making those ‘your mom’ jokes,” Eddie continues, “They’re gross. Your jokes are not that funny in general.”

*Ouch. But you always laugh at my jokes.*

“I mean… You should just be more considerate.”

“I’m sorry, Eds.” The nickname just slips out. It’s always on Richie’s tongue. It can never leave.

“I asked you to stop that! Stop giving me stupid nicknames, and stop pinching my cheeks and calling me cute, come on, Richie, what will people think of us? What will people think of *me?*”

“I’m sorry,” Richie repeats. That’s all he can do.

“*Shut up*, Richie! You’re so goddamn annoying!” Eddie suddenly shouts, and turns around, stomping away.

Richie tries to comprehend what had just happened. His hands are shaking. Where had he heard those exact words earlier?

*His mother.*

Tears finally fall down Richie’s flushed cheeks as Richie collapses against an old tree.

He sobs for almost an hour, and then gets up like nothing has happened, walks home, crawls under the covers without dinner.

--

The following Monday, he's feeling quite good. Confident, even. He's got food – his mother actually made him a sandwich that morning, and on Sunday his father had done a rare thing and blessed him with some pocket money. Well, he had only emptied all the smal coins in his wallet into Richie's cupped hands, but still. So he actually has coins that he's thinking of spending in the arcade. He should probably be wise and save them for food. Who knows how long his mother is going to stay sober and actually cook for Richie.

On that particular Monday, Richie finds himself standing in the school cafeteria, staring at his friends and thinking would they accept his company.

Stan and Eddie are the only ones at table, since the others haven't still arrived. Stan probably wouldn't mind if Richie threw himself next to him and started telling jokes as usual, but it's Eddie Richie is worried about. They haven't talked since Saturday at the barrens, and that had ended with tears in Richie's eyes and annoyance in Eddie's.

Richie looks at Eddie with longing and love. Still, although he thinks Eddie probably hates him.

*Had Eddie just merely tolerated him all this time?* Richie couldn't stand the thought. *But he has always been there for you.*

Richie feigns courage and starts walking towards the table, clutching his battered lunchbox tightly.

Stan and Eddie don't notice him even though he's standing close. They are whispering vehemently at each other. Eddie has even gotten on his knees on the bench, leaning over the table, hands pressed against it so that he's closer to Stan. He has his signature fanny pack, and baby blue t-shirt, and Richie thinks he looks lovely.

"Eddie, honestly, why would you say that to him?" Stan is saying quietly, a slight frown on his face, holding a half-eaten sandwich.

“I don’t know!” Eddie whisper-shouts, “It just slipped out, I swear. I was just so annoyed, I had been looking for him all over town and I was tired…”

“Those are bad excuses,” Stan states, “You knew he was upset. You said he was sulking alone, and smoking. He always smokes when he’s upset, according to Bev.”

*They’re talking about me,* Richie realizes. He’s frozen where he stands.

Eddie squirms nervously, not meeting Stan’s eyes. “I know,” he says softly, “He had hurt his wrist. I think he was lying about how exactly.”

“What do you mean? What did he say?”

“He said that-“ And that’s when Richie’s had enough. He strides forward, and sits down next to Eddie, slamming his lunchbox noisily on the table.

“Good afternoon, fellas!” he greets overenthusiastically.

They hadn’t seen him coming. Stan looks a bit shocked, maybe thinking how much Richie had heard. Eddie’s eyes are comically wide.

“It’s still noon,” says Stan. Eddie doesn’t say anything. His gaze shifts from Richie’s face to his wrist, but Richie is wearing a long-sleeved shirt so Eddie doesn’t see the still blossoming dark pink bruises.

“It’s is? Well, I didn’t realize,” Richie says and takes a bite from his sandwich. “Where are the others?” he asks, mouth full of food.

“I haven’t seen Bev today,” Stan replies, “Ben and Bill have English together, I think they’re coming soon.”

“You remembered your lunch today,” Eddie points out. *I’m sorry,* his eyes say.

*Don’t. I know I can be annoying,* Richie tries to convey to him with a nervous smile.

And then-

He feels something that makes his breath hitch, so that Stan notices, and glances at him curiously.

It's Eddie's little fingers, curling around Richie's longer ones, squeezing them gently – one, twice – then letting go.

Shyly, Richie glances at Eddie, who gives him a reassuring smile, before continuing eating. Richie looks at Stan, but it looks like Stan has no idea what just went down.

"Look, there they are," Stan says and points at Ben, Bill and Beverly coming towards them, Beverly in the middle, explaining something enthusiastically, flailing her arms.

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He spots Silver laying in the grass near the Barrens, and that's how Richie finds out his friends are once again hanging out without him.

*It's not that deep,* he tries to convince himself. *Maybe they just ran into each other and started to hang out.*

*Maybe they forgot about you, just like your parents on a good day.*

Mike's bike is laying a couple feet from Bill's, and Stan's bike is propped carefully against a tree. Richie follows their chatter and laughter, echoing from further away. He recognizes Stan's voice explaining something, cracking a few times, and then comes Mike's loud and contagious laugh.

Bill is shouting something when Richie stumbles between the trees, a branch hitting him in the face.

"Ouch," he mutters, rubbing his cheek.

"G-g-guys!" Bill exclaims at the same time. He's wearing a red flannel

and a baseball cap, and on his hand he's holding a fishing rod. "D-did you s-see that?"

Stan, who had been still laughing with Mike, turns around and asks,

"See what, Billy?"

"The fish!" Bill says, eyes gleaming with excitement. "It was at least th-th-this b-big!" Bill spreads his arms, making Stan roll his eyes fondly.

Before he can control himself, Richie opens his big mouth. "Couldn't have been *that* big!"

"Richie!" Mike says, a genuine smile appearing on his face.

"Where have you been?" Stan says, nudging Richie's shoulder. "We went by your house but you weren't home."

*Of course,* Richie thinks to himself, *Your edgy brain always jumps into conclusions.* Richie had not been home the whole day, trying to avoid his mother's dull gaze.

"Around," Richie says, but that seems to be not enough for Stan who opens his mouth, but Richie beats him to it, "What are you up to?"

"We're fishing," states Mike and now Richie sees he has a rod as well.

"I'm bird watching," says Stan. He has his bird book on one and binoculars on the other hand.

"That's no surprise," Richie snorts.

"We have a rod for you too, Richie," Mike says.

"No thanks," Richie replies, "Where's Eds?" Richie had ridden past Eddie's house, but hadn't had the courage to knock on the door and ask for Eddie's company.

"Man, I can almost h-hear him c-c-complaining 'D-don't call m-me Eds!'" Bill laughs.

“He’s at the doctor’s,” Stan knows.

“And the lovebirds?” Richie wiggles his eyebrows. Stan has already turned around to squint at the trees through his binoculars, so Mike answers,

“Bev and Ben are on a *date.* He took her to see some romantic nonsense at the Aladdin, apparently.”

“Love is disgusting,” Stan comments.

*Love is torture,* Richie thinks, Eddie coming to his mind. *What would you think, Stan, if you knew I was in love with a boy? With our very own Eddie Spaghetti? Would you be even more disgusted?*

“How’s Stan?” Richie asks Mike just to distract himself.

“*Richie,”* comes Stan’s voice, “Why are you asking Mike? I’m right here!”

“I meant the kitten,” Richie snickers.

“Stan’s fine,” Mike answers, “His best friend is Trashmouth, he’s obsessed with her.”

“Wait a minute,” says Richie, “Did you say *her*? Trashmouth’s a *girl?”*

“G-guys!” Bill interrupts Richie’s marveling, after a splashing sound has come from the stream, “It w-was the f-fish again! I s-s-swear, it was h-huge!”

“Nah, Denbrough,” says Richie, sitting a rock next to Mike, “It couldn’t have been bigger than my wang.”

“Which means it must have been a minnow,” Stan says.

“Fuck you, Uris,” Richie says, and even though Stan’s eyes are covered by the binoculars, Richie *swears* he’s rolling his eyes.

In the end, Mike ends up catching a few fish for the kittens. He leaves in hurry, because he had promised to help his grandfather. Richie and Stan part ways with Bill as well, since Bill has to go to see his

speech therapist.

So it's just the two of them, dragging their bikes along the street, in comfortable silence.

"So, what *have* you been up to today?" Stan asks.

"The arcade," says Richie hastily.

"We went to look for you there," Stan says, "You weren't there."

"I don't know. Maybe I was pissing."

Stan raises a brow, and Richie sighs.

"I've been just riding around. I don't even have the money to spend at the arcade, not anymore. I just didn't want to go home."

"Is everything alright? At home, I mean." Stan looks really concerned. He probably knows the most about Richie's home situation, although Richie hasn't said much. He definitely doesn't know about the bruises.

"Yeah, I'm just getting tired of her… you know…" Richie trails off, and thankfully, Stan falls quiet as well.

"I'm sorry about Eddie," Stan says after a while. Richie doesn't dare to look at him.

"What about Eddie?"

"Well on Monday, at lunch, he told me what happened between you two," Stan explains, "How you fought and he called you annoying and left you. He shouldn't have done that."

"I probably deserve that," Richie says. He doesn't like to think about that incident, the pure resentment on Eddie's face.

"Not always," Stan says, and Richie has to stop. Stan has a slight smile on his lips, and his eyes are earnest. He stops as well and the two boys stare at each other.

“Thanks, Stan,” Richie whispers hoarsely.

“Eddie was a jerk,” Stan states, “I don’t know what his problem was, maybe his mom had been extra difficult that day. Either way, he truly regretted lashing out on you like that, you must know that. He was really scared that he had damaged your friendship in some way.”

“Everything’s fine,” Richie says although there’s a lump forming in his throat and he just knows his eyes are glistening with unshed tears behind his glasses. Stan doesn’t say anything about that. Instead he smiles again.

“I know, because it’s you and Eddie,” Stan reassures.

“I’m in love with him,” Richie blurts out. He wishes he could just bite his tongue off. Heat rises on his cheeks, and the tears finally fall.

“I know,” Stan says after a pause, “I’ve known for a while.”

“Eddie, he-“

“Come here,” Stan decides, and pulls Richie into a hug, wrapping his arms around Richie’s shaking shoulders.

“Eddie, does he?” Richie sobs against Stan’s shoulder.

Patting Richie’s back a bit awkwardly, Stan answers, “Know? He doesn’t have a clue, Richie.”

“How does he feel about me?” Richie whimpers.

“I don’t know. Even I don’t know everything. He likes you Richie – and he cares about, a lot. But I don’t know if he… You know… The only way to know is from him.”

Richie takes a ragged breath, “I’m scared, Stan. I’m so scared.”

“I know, Rich. You must be careful. You must be very careful.”

Somehow, Richie knows Stan doesn’t mean he has to be careful with Eddie. He has to be careful with the world.

*How could I ever think he would be disgusted by me?*

--

Richie is on his way to Beverly's, when he hears Belch Huggins's voice.

"Look! It's Bucky Beaver!"

He sprints. He runs – his feet have become fast during the years of being chased, but the older boys are faster.

Even though Bowers is gone – and Hockstetter – Huggins and Criss still continue the tradition of chasing and tormenting the Losers' Club.

They catch up with him pretty quickly, and it's not just Huggins and Criss, there are also other boys, whose names Richie doesn't know but who he's seen around.

*Not now. Not today,* Richie thinks as Criss's fist collides with his jaw. His ribs are still aching from the beating he took from his dad yesterday.

Half an hour later, he limps to Beverly's house, face covered with blood, hugging himself to ease the aching from his sides.

It's Beverly's aunt who opens the door. She had come from Portland to Derry to look after her niece, deeming that it was better for her to stay with her friends. Beverly had wanted to leave, but she had wanted to stay as bad. So she had stayed.

"Dear God, boy, what happened to you?" she gasps as she sets her eyes on the beaten boy on her doorstep.

"Don't worry about me, Miss," Richie says, "Just played a little rough. Is Bev home?"

"Beverly! Your friend Richie is here!" Beverly's aunt shouts.

“Tell him to come upstairs!” Beverly answers.

It’s a torture to climb up the stairs, but Richie manages. He’s wincing from pain when he stumbles into Beverly’s room.

Beverly, who had been applying lipstick, drops the tube and the little mirror she’s holding when she notices Richie and his ragged state.

“Holy f-,” she just says and stares.

“I’m okay!” Richie hurries to say, “Peachy!” He tries to wipe the already half-dried, sticky blood off his face.

“Was it Belch? And Criss?” Beverly asks as she hops off the chair and comes to inspect Richie’s injuries. His lip is pulsing – split – and he’s pretty sure his glasses are broken.

Beverly slips the glasses off Richie’s face, and Richie hisses. Beverly’s face turns into a blur in front of him as she gently touches his face.

“It doesn’t look that bad,” she says, “Does it hurt much?”

“I’ve had it worse,” Richie admits. It’s true, he’s the one the Bowers gang has beaten up most frequently. He just can’t keep his mouth shut.

Beverly sighs, sounding sad. “Let’s get you cleaned up,” she says, and soon she is wiping the blood off with a damp cloth.

The doorbell rings, and they both freeze. They hear Beverly’s aunt go openthe door, and muffled talking.

“Beverly-y! You have another visitor!”

“Probably Ben,” Beverly mutters, “Is it okay if he…”

“Yeah, totally,” Richie breathes. He’s not really in the mood of seeing anyone, but Ben is chill.

“Who is it?” Beverly yells towards the hallway.

“Oh, I don’t know, the little one,” comes her aunt’s voice.

“Eddie,” Beverly and Richie both whisper. Beverly chews her lip.

“I don’t want him to see me,” Richie says. He doesn’t exactly know why. He and Eddie are all good now.

“Richie, please,” Beverly says, “I’m telling him to come up. He can help.”

A few seconds later, Eddie strolls in.

“Bev, I was just stopping by to ask you *holy shit!”*

And there Eddie is, gaping at the bleeding Richie sitting on the edge of Beverly’s bed.

“We’re having a little situation in our hands, Eddie,” Beverly says and offer the bloody cloth to Eddie. “Could you continue cleaning him up? I need to find him a new shirt.” Richie’s own shirt is torn and bloody.

Eddie eyes the cloth warily, but takes it and sits next to Richie, their thighs touching.

“Could you look at me, Rich,” Eddie says gently, but Richie continues looking down at his shaking hands. Eddie decides to take the matter into his own hands, and grabs Richie’s chin, turning his head towards him.

He wipes all the blood, then throws the cloth away. Beverly is still digging through her drawers.

“I’m 100% Ben has left his shirt here,” Beverly mutters.

“Oh, great, Ben the fashion icon,” Richie chuckles, then winces because of the pain shooting through his face. Eddie notices it, and takes Richie’s hand, squeezing it, before letting go, and taking Richie’s glasses from the bedside table where Beverly had placed them.

He wipes the blood of the lenses with his thumb, which is something unusual for Eddie. But they’ve all changed since the previous summer, since… well, Richie doesn’t like to think about *It.*

When slides the glasses back on Richie's face, he's extremely gentle. "Your other lens is broken," Eddie points out, his breath tickling Richie's face.

*Oh, crap,* Richie thinks when he sees a horizontal line bothering his vision. He swallows a lump in his throat. "I'll just have to ask my dad for a new one."

His dad is going to be pissed. He's going to be *so* pissed.

Eddies hands him Beverly's small heart-shaped mirror, and Richie has to *squint* to see his battered face.

It's not bad, as Beverly had said. He has split and swollen lip, some bruises are forming underneath his left eye and on his right cheek. There's a cut on his forehead, but it's not bleeding anymore. Otherwise, he's fine.

He really is fine.

"Aha!" Beverly exclaims, "Found it!" She tosses a large black t-shirt on the bed.

"I really- I really can manage with this one," Richie protests.

"Nonsense," Eddie huffs. Then he actually lunges forward, grabs the hem of Richie's shirt and pulls it off.

Beverly hisses as she sees the bruises. "Those are really impressive."

Eddie looks horrified. "Richie, should we go to the hospital?" he says nervously, zipping and unzipping his fanny pack.

"No, no!" Richie says, swatting away Beverly's hand that's inching closer to his side. He grabs Ben's shirt and throws it on, glaring at Eddie.

And then, before he can stop it, he starts to cry.

Horrendous sobs ravage his already abused body. Eddie is wrapping his arms around Richie's shoulders, and Beverly takes his hand, and Richie continues to cry, not being able to stop it.

“You’ll be fine,” Eddie whispers, “Everything will be fine, and we’ll make sure they’ll never touch you again.”

“We promise,” says Beverly, caressing Richie’s knuckles.

“No, no,” Richie whimpers, and Eddie tightens his hold, pressing his face against Richie’s cheek. “I don’t care if they beat me up.”

“Richie, you should! You have done nothing to deserve those beatings,” Beverly shushes.

Richie sniffles. *You have done nothing to deserve those beatings.* Yesterday, his dad had barged into his room, accusing him of stealing his cigarettes, which Richie would *never* do. His father had, of course, not believed him, and instead thrown a chair at him, then proceeded to kick him as he tried curl and protect himself on the floor. He’d cried for a solid hour on the floor, then went over at Bill’s as if nothing had happened.

His parents didn’t love him.

Richie thinks about it, how all the other Losers had someone. Beverly’s dad had been all messed up, but now she had her aunt who truly cared about her. Eddie’s mom loved him in her own weird way. Stan’s dad may be strict, but he was loving, and his mom adored the boy. Bill’s parents had been distant since Georgie’s death, but they’d probably care if their other son went missing. Ben had a loving mother. Mike had his grandfather.

“No one loves me,” Richie whispers.

“What?” Eddie and Beverly gasp in unison. Facing them is an unbearable thought to Richie right now, so he opts to stare at his hands, clasped in his lap.

“Richie, what did you say?” Beverly whispers, tucking a curl behind Richie’s ear. “You better not have said what I just heard.”

“Yeah,” whispers Eddie on Richie’s other side. “Richie, what is it?”

“Oh, you heard damn well what I just said,” Richie says venomously.

“You don’t-“ Eddie’s voice cracks. “You don’t actually believe it, do you?”

“What did I just say?” Richie spits, and turns his angry, tearful gaze at Eddie, “I said that no one loves me and that’s the whole truth. You should ask my parents. They don’t give a shit about me. They wouldn’t notice if I went missing. They’d probably be glad to get me out of the way. In fact, I should just disappear. That would be the best for everyone.”

“Richie!” Beverly gasps, scandalized. “No, how can you think that! That’s bullshit!”

“Richie, no,” Eddie echoes desperately, clutching Richie’s shoulders and pulling the boy towards him.

But Richie isn’t having it. He shoves Eddie and glares at him.

“Richie, listen to me,” Beverly says, now in a much calmer voice. “Your parents – who gives a shit about them? If they don’t care about you, well, that breaks my heart but you must remember there are at least six people who absolutely love you.”

“Oh, really?” Richie rolls his eyes. “I’m really just a nuisance.”

“No, you aren’t,” says Beverly sternly, “I love you. Eddie loves you.” And Beverly and Richie look at Eddie, who swallows and nods.

*No, he doesn’t,* decides Richie. *Otherwise he would have said it! He would have fucking said it! He’ll never love you, and you just have to learn to live with that.*

And Beverly – she just said that because she had to.

“I love you, Eddie loves you, Bill loves you, Stan loves you, Mike loves you, Ben loves you,” Beverly says, holding both of Richie’s hands in hers, tightly. “You *have to* believe that. We love you so much.”

“So much,” Eddie repeats, playing with the curls on the nape of Richie’s neck.

*That's not really true,* Richie thinks, but nods. Otherwise they won't shut up, and Richie is done with listening to these false proclaims of love.

--

The next Friday the whole gang finds themselves gathered at Beverly's. Her aunt has an evening shift, so the house is empty and they're free to do whatever they like, but despite that the Losers are sitting in a circle on the living room floor, joking and laughing – having a good time.

Eddie is groaning at a dumb joke Richie had just made, when Bill gets a mysterious look in his eyes.

"What is it, Bill?" Beverly asks teasingly, gently punching Bill's arm.

"You g-guys will never g-g-guess what I snatched f-from my d-d-ad," Bill smirks.

"What?" asks Stan, sounding genuinely curious. Bill doesn't answer him, just stands up and walks to the hall. All of them crane their necks to see Bill digging through his backpack. When he returns, he's carrying a small flask.

"Is that-" Mike says, his mouth forming an 'o'.

"My dad's v-v-vodka," Bill grins.

"Bad Big Bill!" Richie says. "I never thought you'd do something naughty like this."

"Well, give us a taste!" Beverly urges, making grabby hands at Bill. Bill tosses the flask to her, and Beverly immediately takes a swig.

A nervous feeling fills Richie's insides, but he just puts on a smile and watches Beverly cough as she hands the flask to Ben, who takes a gulp and then proceeds to look like he's in pain.

“Wow,” Ben mutters. He’s squeezing his eyes shut, blindly shoving the flask in Mike’s direction. Eddie snickers next to Richie. Bill’s eyes are keen on Mike, who stares at the flask carefully, then takes a swig as well. His cheeks puff out like chipmunk’s, and Stan snorts at him.

Mike manages to swallow the liquor. “Your turn, Stanley,” he smirks, dangling the bottle in front of Stan’s face. Stan rolls his eyes, and snags it. He takes two big gulps, and then wipes his mouth on the back of his hand. He raises his brow, looking at everyone who’s staring at him in awe. Ben and Beverly start to giggle in unison.

“Eddie?” Stan says and then, the flask is in Eddie’s small hands.

Richie can smell the familiar stench of vodka. One of her mother’s favorite drinks, actually. He wants to take it away from Eddie and throw it across the room and yell at Bill.

Eddie sets the flask on the floor, unzips his fanny pack and takes out a wipe. He carefully scrubs the mouth of the flask.

“Oh, really, Eddie?” says Stan.

“Who knows where your mouth’s been,” Eddie mutters. He brings the flask to his lips, and tilts the bottle. Barely a droplet falls down on Eddie’s pink tongue that’s peeking out between his lips.

“C-come on, Eddie,” Bill chuckles.

“Drink properly, well all did,” Stan says.

“Guys, if he doesn’t want to-“ But Richie doesn’t get to finish before Stan has seized the bottle and poured a fair amount of the liquor into Eddie’s mouth.

“Stanley!” Richie gasp as Eddie coughs, vodka drippling down his chin.

“What?” Stan says. Eddie’s coughs die down. He’s still clutching the flask, which he promptly brings back to his lips, and then he takes another gulp. He coughs for another minute, until Richie shoves his aspirator in his mouth. They all know it’s bullshit, but it seems to help Eddie.

“I was going to do it, Stanley!” Eddie hisses at Stan as he’s recovered. Stan smirks proudly.

And then, Eddie’s small hands shove the flask in to Richie’s long fingers. Ice fills Richie’s veins as his hands come into contact with the cool bottle.

His fingers start to shake.

“Weren’t we going to watch a movie today? Did you rent some, Bev?” He tries changing the subject. Instead, he’s met with Bill’s slight frown.

“Richie, it’s your turn,” Ben says.

“Oh, this?” Richie says, as if he had just now noticed he was holding the bottle, “Doesn’t anyone else want a second sip? Or are we just going to let Eds and Stan the Man slurp all of it?”

“Don’t you want any?” Beverly asks, eyes confused.

Richie snorts, but he’s terrified inside. He doesn’t want that liquid touching his lips. He doesn’t want it *inside* him.

*If I kissed Eddie now, his lips would taste like vodka,* Richie muses.

Why is he thinking about kissing Eddie at this moment? Why is he thinking about kissing Eddie at all?

“This? I can think of something better to drink…” *Water. Milk. Juice. Soda. Coffee. Tea.*

“Don’t be a wuss, Richie,” comes Eddie’s annoyed voice.

Richie stares at the flask. He opens it, and the stark familiar smell greets him.

*I really can’t drink this.*

*And I really don’t want say why.*

So he silently hands the flask back to Bill.

“Richie-“ Bill says, and then something dawns on his face. Richie watches as each of the Losers individually realize what’s going on.

Eddie is the last.

“I’m sorry, Rich,” Eddie says quietly, his voice very small. He squeezing Richie’s arm, and Richie hates how Stan stares at them because he *knows.* Richie chooses to stare at floor – he can’t face anyone, he feels humiliated.

Eddie’s hand disappears from Richie’s arm as Eddie stands up and leaves. A few seconds later, he returns with a can of Coca-Cola, handing it to Richie like a peace offering.

Richie’s lips turn to smile and Eddie’s earnest brown eyes meet his.

*He really loves his boy.*

--

It’s Eddie who’s tugging his sleeve, Richie knows that before even before he turns around.

“Rich, wait up!” Eddie says, his breath wheezing.

*Maybe he has asthma after all,* Richie thinks, although most of Eddie’s attacks were actually anxiety-related.

Ben is trailing right after Eddie, clutching the straps of his backpack, concerned eyes on the smaller boy.

*That’s odd,* thinks Richie. Not that Eddie and Ben weren’t friends – they got along perfectly, but Richie had never seen them hanging out, just the two of them. The only thing they really have in common is that they both don’t have a dad.

“What, Eddie?” Richie says as Eddie takes deep breaths. “Where’s your aspirator?”

“No, I don’t need it!” Eddie insists.

“Are you sure?” asks Ben.

“Yes! Richie, me and Ben were wondering… Would you like to join us?” Eddie asks, “We’re heading over at Ben’s.”

“Oh,” Richie says, “What would we be doing?”

“I want to try a new cookie recipe,” Ben declares.

“Wouldn’t you want to do that with Bev?”

Ben rolls his eyes. “Just because she’s my girlfriend, it doesn’t mean we do everything together!”

“But you kind of do that,” Eddie comments with a smirk.

“Yeah, well, she has chores, so I asked Mike but he’s doing something with Stan,” Ben explains, “Something that involves the kittens, and Bill’s seeing his speech therapist…”

*Great. I’m the last resort.*

“Why do you want me interrupting your date, Eddie?” Richie says, pushing up the glasses that are gliding down his nose. Yesterday, his father had finally gotten him a new lens. He hadn’t been pleased about it, and Richie isn’t getting any pocket money soon, but at least he didn’t hit him.

“Richie, really?” Eddie says, looking done with him. “Why do I even bother with asking?”

Richie thinks about going home. His father is still at work, but his mother would be there, and Richie didn’t want to face her dull eyes and alcohol tinted breath.

“No, no, Eds – Benny Boy – I will join you gents!” he rushes to say.

“Great!” says Ben,

Ben’s home is clean. The kitchen counters are shining as Ben is

collecting all the needed ingredients around the kitchen as Richie and Eddie just stand and stare.

Richie hasn't been to Ben's house since he explained to them about the history of Derry. That was the day Beverly joined the gang, the day they'd spent swimming at the quarry, before Mike was part of the group.

Before they faced *It.*

"Eddie, could you come help me? I need you to add the ingredients as a stir the batter," Ben says. "Richie, could you break three eggs in that bowl?"

"Sure, Egg Boy," Richie says and Ben gets a weird look in his eye.

When the batter is ready, and Ben's back is turned, Richie sticks his finger in the bowl and scoops some of it in his mouth.

"Richie!" Eddie gasps, "You know that contains raw egg? Do you want salmonella?"

"Isn't that the princess with the glass shoes?" Ben asks.

"No! That's *Cinderella! Salmonella* is a disease you get from eating raw egg or undercooked chicken," Eddie says.

"What happens when you got salmonella?" Richie asks, scooping some more cookie cough in his mouth.

Eddie grimaces. "My mom says you start shitting and throwing up at the same time," he says.

"Sucks," Richie hums, sucking his fingers.

"Stop that!" Eddie hisses.

"Yeah, Richie, stop, or we don't have anything left for the actual cookies," Ben scolds.

The three boys end up sitting in front of the oven, staring at the chocolate chip cookies baking. That's where Ben's mother finds them.

“I didn’t know you were having friends over,” she comments fondly.

“Yeah, sorry Mom… I didn’t tell you,” Ben mutters.

“That’s okay,” says Mrs. Hanscom, “Are you Bill and Stanley?” she asks, setting the grocery bag on the table.

“No, I’m Richie, that’s Eddie,” Richie says.

“Well, it’s nice to meet you. Where’s your sweetheart, Benjamin?”

Richie smirks at Ben, who’s blushing. “Beverly had chores,” he mutters, “Do you need help with the groceries?”

“No, honey, keep on watching the cookies,” says Mrs. Hanscom.

Richie wishes his mother was more like Mrs. Hanscom – neat, and nice, and sober. That she’d actually *care* about her son. Hell, he’d even take Eddie’s mother over his own.

When Richie and Eddie are walking home later that day, both holding baskets full of cookies Mrs. Hanscom had packed for them, Eddie stops in front of Richie’s house. His cheeks are delicate pink and he has cookie crumbs on his perfect lips.

“Richie,” Eddie whispers, and boy, does Richie love the sound of his name on Eddie’s lips, “Could you please come over tonight? Climb through my window, I’ll leave it open, as always.”

*Of course,* Richie wants to say, but instead, “Why?” comes out of his mouth.

Eddie doesn’t look Richie in the eye as he replies, “I need to tell you something.”

“Why not now?” Richie insists.

“Because I’m not brave enough now. But I will be in the evening. Be in my room at ten.”

--

Ten o'clock, sharp, Richie climbs through Eddie Kaspbrak's bedroom window.

He knocks over a lamp.

"Richard!" Eddie hisses.

"Edward!" Richie hisses back. "You think that woke up your mom?"

Eddie presses his ear against the door, frowning in concentration. "No, she's still snoring," he says after a minute of careful listening.

"So, what's the occasion for a sleepover?" Richie asks, picking up the lamp he had dropped and putting in back on the desk.

Eddie sits on his bed, twitching his fingers. He's so short his feet don't hit the floor as he dangles them. Eddie pats the space next to him. "Come sit here, Rich," he says softly.

The atmosphere turns very serious. Richie chews his lower lip, staring at Eddie who's eyes are pleading him to join him.

So, Richie does. He leans back on his hands, and Eddie inches his hand closer so that their pinkies are touching. Butterflies erupt in Richie's stomach, and he feels electricity shoot where Eddie's skin touches his.

"Where did you get this?" Eddie asks, his voice less than a whisper, as he lifts his other hand and brushes against the bruises blooming on Richie's jaw.

*My mom got frustrated.*

"I fell from my bike," Richie says, though it's hard to get those words leave his lips.

"Again," Eddie tuts, "You need to be more careful. What if you crack your head open? That cannot be fixed with a bandaid!"

“Relax, Eds, I can be careful!”

“Don’t call me Eds,” Eddie mutters halfheartedly. His pinky isn’t touching Richie’s anymore, but instead, he does something that makes Richie’s breath hitch.

He takes Richie’s hand in both of his, and squeezes Richie’s long fingers, caressing his knuckles with his thumb.

Richie’s eyes widen as he stares at their hands. Eddie is breathing softly, opening and closing his mouth as if he wants to say something.

“Eds?” Richie says, voice cracking.

“Yes, Rich?” Eddie says, not chastising him about the nickname this time. They stare at each other, brown eyes meeting.

*Tell him. Kiss him.*

“Um-“, Richie says instead, swallowing nervously.

Removing one of his hands around Richie’s fingers, Eddie reaches to touch Richie’s cheek. “Richie. The reason why I asked you to come is that… Well, remember when Criss and Belch beat you up that one day, when you went to Beverly’s, and I was there too?”

“Yes?” Richie whispers hoarsely.

“You told us- You told us no one loved you.” Eddie looks like it hurts him to say that. His thumb is caressing over Richie’s freckles, and his other hand squeezing Richie’s fingers. “Why were you lying?”

“I wasn’t lying,” Richie says defiantly, but his voice is shaky and thick from tears he’s holding back.

“Like Bev said – bullshit,” Eddie whispers sharply. He drops his hand from Richie’s cheek, and instead leans his forehead against his temple. “You must know, Richie,” Eddie says, his voice barely above a whisper, “That I love you more than anything.”

Richie fights back a sob. He’s whole body is shaking, but in a good way.

Eddie's touch is like electricity as he squeezes Richie's hand.

"Why are you crying?" Eddie asks, "Please don't cry. You have nothing to cry about," he soothes, using his thumb to wipe the tears from Richie's pale cheeks. Then, he abruptly stops, and his face becomes very serious.

"I'm sorry if I've crossed some line here and I'm sorry if I've made you feel uncomfortable," Eddie says, his voice now wobbly.

"No, Eddie," Richie replies quickly, "Not at all. I- I love you too."

It slides surprisingly easy from Richie's lips – it should, since it's Eddie, and Eddie owns Richie's heart. But he's terrified too – he remembers how Eddie had looked at him that one day at the Barrens. He knew how Eddie could despise him.

The small smile that appears on Eddie's thin lips is worth everything. "Love me – as friends? Like you love Stan and Bill, and everyone else?"

"Well," Richie breathes, but he can't say anything. He's frozen, afraid, and he feels so nervous he could throw up.

"Richie," Eddie says, sounding determined, "Can I try one thing? Could you look at me?"

Richie looks at Eddie – he would do anything Eddie asks him to do – and takes in Eddie's face, his wide brown eyes, the hundreds of freckles on his nose, his lips – soft and pink.

*He's so pretty.*

Richie's legs feel like jelly, when Eddie scoots closer. He lifts his hands, and slowly removes Richie's glasses that are held together by tape. All Richie sees now is blur, but he does see that Eddie sets the glasses carefully aside, and then leans closer, closer, *closer…*

And there it is – a slight brush of Eddie's lips against his. It's heavenly, even though it's just a dry close-mouthed kiss, but it's Richie's first, and it's with *Eddie Kaspbrak.*

After a moment that feels like an eternity, Eddie pulls back, and looks down shyly. “How- what do you think?”

*I loved it. I loved every short second of it. Please do it again. Never stop, please.*

Instead, Richie blurts out, “That’s all I’m going to get, Eddie Spaghetti? No tongue?”

“Beep beep, Richie,” Eddie mutters. His entire face is red, and he hits Richie with a pillow.

“Give me back my glasses, Eds,” Richie commands. *Eddie Kaspbrak kissed me,* he’s screaming inside his head.

“Don’t call me Eds,” Eddie says, but the tone of his voice in fond. He puts the glasses back on Richie’s face, then kisses his nose. The two boys giggle, and then Eddie gives Richie another kiss, a proper one on the lips that lingers longer than the first one.

“Do you want to spend the night?” Eddie whispers against Richie’s lips, his face bumping Richie’s glasses askew.

“Yes, *please,”* says Richie, pecking Eddie’s lips – once, twice

– three times.

They fall asleep holding hands, and don’t let go during the night.

-

They don’t tell anyone.

But everyone knows.

It’s written in them – the way Beverly’s eyes linger on Richie and Eddie’s fingers, almost touching. The way Ben smirks after Eddie blushes deep red when Richie gives him another affectionate

nickname. The way Bill gives them time alone. The way Mike doesn't say anything when they hold hands, like it's meant to be.

The only one who explicitly knows is Stan, because of Richie's confession, and Richie can see how happy he is for him – for them. Stan's smiles are subtle, but one time Richie catches him flashing thumbs up to him when Richie wraps his arm around Eddie's shoulders.

It's always safe – well, actually it's never safe, but it's safe around the Losers' Club, those little affectionate touches, caresses, hand holding, pecks on the cheek and kisses on the palm. It's safe in the Barrens, in their club house. It's safe in the corner of Beverly's room, in the Denbroughs' basement, at Mike's farm and even in the Uris' livingroom.

But it's not safe in the streets.

And sometimes –

Richie forgets.

They're walking home from the Barres, Richie, Eddie and Stan. The street is so narrow they can't all three walk side by side, so Stan walks behind Richie and Eddie.

When they're passing the Aladdin, Richie grabs Eddie's hand, almost absentmindedly. It's a natural instinct to him, and he loves the feel of Eddie's warm fingers wrapped around his. They bring warmth to his whole body in the chill late summer that'll turn autumn the next week. The cool wind is tickling his cheeks, ruffling his hair, and he can hear Stan's steps behind them, feel Stan's gaze on his back, but he doesn't mind, it's just Stan.

"I need to tie my shoelace," comes Stan's voice, and they all stop at the corner of a street.

Richie drops Eddie had, half accidentally, half on instinct, when the rock hits him.

"GO TO HELL, YOU FAGGOTS!" shouts the voice of a stranger.

The rock has hit Richie's temple. It didn't break his skin, but it was still painful, and it did knock his glasses of his face. They've dropped at Stan's feet, Stan's, who picks them up and turns to look in the direction of the voice.

It's a group of boys, a few years older than them, snickering.

"FUCK YOU!" Richie shouts at them, startling Eddie. Stan flips them off. They guys don't even notice. They've already forgotten about them.

"What was that?" Eddie says, his little voice shaky.

"That was hate," says Stan, his voice ice cold.

"Are you okay?" Richie asks Eddie.

"Am I okay?" Eddie fumes, pointing at himself. "It's you who got hit!" Eddie touches Richie's temple and Richie can't help flinching.

"I'm fine," Richie says, swatting Eddie's hand away. Stan hands Richie his glasses.

One of the lenses is broken again. Richie wants to cry. His father – he'll be furious. Richie would rather be hit by a rock again than face his father's wrath.

"You do realize you can't do that!" Stan suddenly shouts at them, his voice cracking.

Richie takes a startled step back, and Eddie looks confused. "What?" Eddie breathes.

"Hold hands! You can't do that!"

"What Stan?" Richie says, "Do you have something against us?"

"No!" Stan whines, "No, but people throw rocks at you! You get it? People throw rocks at you!"

Eddie stares at his feet. Richie swallows. He knows what Stan means.

“You must be careful,” Stan says, quieter now because they were drawing attention. He looks at them pointedly. “Promise me.”

“We promise,” says Eddie, and Richie nods.

--

When Richie gets home, he’s shaking.

“Dad?” he calls into the living room, but sees only his mother passed out on the couch, as usual. “Shit,” Richie mutters, and tiptoes upstairs to his room. *It’s not that bad,* he thinks, squinting at the walls. *At least the other one isn’t broken. He’ll manage.*

He nearly jumps out of his skin when he’s faced by his father in the corridor. He’s holding an empty beer bottle, and his face turns into a frown when he spots Richie.

*Cleaning after Mom,* Richie thinks. That’s rare. Usually, it’s Richie’s job.

“Richard,” his father says sternly, “What happened to your glasses?”

“I- I dropped them,” Richie says. Technically, it’s true.

“Liar!” his father suddenly roars, taking two quick steps towards Richie, and shoving him, hard. “You annoyed those older brats again, didn’t you? I’ve told you to stay out of their way and keep your mouth shut, a thousand times! Why don’t you *ever* listen to me?”

Richie can’t tell his father the truth. He can’t say to him, *No, really, someone threw a rock at me because I was holding Eddie Kaspbrak’s hand in broad daylight.*

Wentworth Tozier would believe him, and he would be furious.

So, Richie turns away from his father, hoping to sneak quickly into the safety of his room, but his father isn’t having it.

“Where do you think you’re going?” he *growls*. Despite the menace in his voice, Richie takes another step, and then the bottle hits his head.

Richie’s ears are ringing. His vision turns more and more blurry, and he feels sharp pain on the side of his head. His father is yelling something, but Richie can’t distinguish the words. He just wants to… sleep.

He slumps against the wall, and something is thrown in his lap. Richie removes his hand from his bleeding temple to pick up the bills that get stained with blood.

“Go buy yourself new glasses, clown!” his father mutters as he’s passing his son, and this Richie can understand.

After minutes, maybe hours later he stands up on wobbly legs, careful of the shards surrounding him. The house is silent, Richie doesn’t even hear the television. He staggers towards the phone, picks it up and stares at the numbers, his pale fingers covered in sticky blood hovering above them.

*Eddie, I can’t call Eddie,* Richie thinks frantically, *He’ll freak out, because of the blood, thinks he’ll get some infection.*

*But Eddie didn’t mind the time when you were beaten up,* another voice reminds.

The truth is, he doesn’t want Eddie to know.

Who else? Who else can he call? Richie feels hazy. He can barely remember his friends’ faces.

He lets his fingers punch in Stan’s number. We waits, but no one answers. He tries another number.

“Hello? Denbrough residence,” a male voice answers.

“Mr. Denbrough, it’s Richie Tozier,” Richie says, voice almost robotic, “May I speak to Bill?”

Richie waits for a minute. Then, “Hi, R-Richie, it’s B-B-Bill.”

“Bill,” Richie sighs. “I need your help. Can I come over?”

“R-Richie, it’s 10PM. Wh-what will your p-p-par-“

“My parents don’t give a shit, okay!” Richie shouts. He rubs his temple. His head hurts, it’s pounding.

The line is silent for a moment. “D-Did you c-call E-Ed-Eddie?” Bill asks.

“No!” Richie says sharply. He hears someone say something to Bill at his end.

“It’s R-Richie,” Bill answers, voice slightly muffled because he’s not speaking directly into the phone.

“Who was that?” Richie asks.

“Eddie’s staying over,” Bill says.

*Hang up. Call Beverly,* Richie thinks immediately. Instead of acting on it, he says to Bill, “I’ll be there in ten minutes.”

Richie hangs up before Bill can reply, stuffs the bills into his pocket. He runs to his room, grabs his most important stuff, and throws them into his school backpack. He rushes downstairs, throws on his jacket which is starting to be too small for him, and his out, on his bike.

He’s not returning into that house for a while. He’d rather be homeless.

--

Bill is standing on the porch when Richie gets to the Denbroughs’s. Richie throws his bike on the lawn. He runs to Bill, and throws his arms around his friend, shaking. Bill pats his back gently, and whispers, “We need t-to be really quiet, s-s-so that m-my d-d-dad won’t n-notice.”

Richie nods against Bill's shoulder, blinking back tears. Bill takes his hands leads him slowly through the house. He lets go when they reach Bill's room.

Eddie is sitting on Bill's bed, eyes wide and nervous, twisting his fingers. There's a sleeping bag on the floor, and an interrupted card game on Bill's desk. Richie mentally scolds himself for ruining their sleepover.

Eddie jumps up when Bill has kicked the door shut, and walks up to Richie, taking his face in his hands. He caresses Richie's cheeks with his thumbs as he tilts his face, noticing the injury.

"Bill," Eddie whispers, and Bill takes a few nervous steps towards them, "We needs some supplies. This doesn't look good," Eddie says grimly. His hands drops, and he leads Richie to Bill's bed, making him sit down.

Bill is gone for a minute, then returns with an armful of medical supplies.

Richie lets Eddie tuck his hair away from his temple, and press the cotton soaked in disinfectant against the gash left by the bottle. Richie hisses, and Bill grabs his hand, letting Richie squeeze his fingers. Eddie wipes away the blood that has run down Richie's face, and then bandages the wound.

He kisses Richie's cheek, even though Bill is right there, next to them.

"What happened?" Eddie asks softly, taking Richie's hand away from Bill, and holding it in both of his.

*I can't lie to Eddie,* Richie decides. He really can't lie to Bill, either.

"My dad," he says, voice breaking.

Eddie looks confused, concerned, sad and finally, furious. "I'll kill him," he says sharply, pulling Richie towards him in a bone-crushing hug.

"B-Bastard," Bill says.

“He was mad at me, for breaking my glasses again. I knew he would be,” Richie tells them, trying not the let the tears in his eyes fall. “He yelled at he, hit me with a bottle. And he gave me these.” He pulls the bills out of his pocket. “For the new lens. But I don’t think they’re enough.”

Bill stands up, and Richie leans against Eddie, who wraps his arms around Richie, and puts his chin on top of Richie’s head, kissing his curls.

Bill is opening his piggy bank, letting the coins fall on the bed.

“No, Bill,” Richie says when he realizes what Bill is doing.

“I want to h-help you, Richie,” Bill insists, starting count the money.

“I’m not your charity case, Denbrough,” Richie says.

“No, you are my f-f-friend, and you c-can’t walk a-around in your b-b-broken g-glasses,” Bill says.

“I’ll give you my savings, too,” Eddie says. Richie shakes his head. He knows Eddie had been saving up his pocket money for a new bike.

“No, Eddie, I can manage with just one lens. Your bike…”

“No, you really can’t,” Eddie says, and smiles shyly, “But I can manage with my old bike. And you’re more important.”

“Eddie,” Richie whines.

“Put the money away, Bill,” Eddie says, “Richie needs to sleep. We’ll talk about this in the morning.”

Bill scoops the coins back into the piggy bank. “You c-can have the b-b-bed. I can take E-Eddie’s s-s-sleeping b-bag.”

Richie and Eddie settle into Bill’s large bed, knees against each other’s, hands clasped between them. Eddie scoots even closer to him, rubbing his nose against Richie’s.

“I’m glad you got out of there. I’m glad you’re here with me,” Eddie

whispers, and presses a sweet kiss to Richie's lips. Richie hums, content. In this moment, he's happy.

The next afternoon, he finds himself back in Bill's room, sitting on his bed with unbroken glasses. He owes Eddie and Bill a lot of money now, but he doesn't want to think about that.

"I don't really want to go back there," he had confessed, and that's the reason why Bill is pacing around his room, and Eddie, who sits on the floor, is staring at Richie with wide and concerned eyes.

"I'd really want you to stay with me, but my Mom..." Eddie sighs, hanging his head miserably.

"I know. She'd be *so* jealous," says Richie, and Eddie frowns at him.

"Richie, now is not the time to joke," he scolds.

They look at Bill, who's stopped.

"I- I h-have an idea," Bill says.

"Shoot," Richie urges him. Eddie stands up and comes to sit next to Richie, taking his hand.

"Y-you c-can stay h-here," Bill says.

"In your room?" asks Eddie, "So what? He's going to sleep on the floor every night? Or are you going to be chivalrous and offer the bed to him?"

Bill rolls his eyes. "Relax, Eddie. I w-was thinking h-h-he'd stay in G-G-G-", Bill takes a deep sigh, "Georgie's room."

Richie's brows climb towards his hairline. "Really?"

Bills throws himself on the bed. "Yeah," he says quietly, "No one goes there. E-e-ever. R-richie can sleep there. G-G-Georgie's b-bed might be a little t-too small, but it'll d-do. It's b-b-better than a m-mattress on the f-f-floor, anyway. And I c-can smuggle him f-food."

"Bill. You don't really have to," Richie says, looking at his friend

fondly.

“You s-said y-yourself you d-d-don’t w-want to go h-home,” Bill states.

Richie fidgets with the hem of his shirt. “Yes, but maybe I have to.”

“No,” Eddie says firmly.

Richie sighs. “Fine. I’ll stay here some time. But you know, Bill, I can’t stay forever.”

“I know,” Bill says glumly.

--

And so, Richie Tozier becomes the fourth resident in the Denbrough household, although Mr. and Mrs. Denbrough don’t know that their only remaining son has hidden his friend in his little brother’s dusty, abandoned room.

Richie gets used to Georgie Denbrough’s small bed really quickly. He still feels scared and lonely, curled in it at nights, even after Bill has come to wish him good night. He’s afraid that his father will barge in any second, and drag him back home.

Some nights, he can’t stand the loneliness, so he takes his bike, which is hidden in the abandoned shed with Bill’s Silver, in the Denbrough’s backyard, and goes to Eddie. He climbs through his boyfriend’s window, and wakes Eddie up by crawling into his bed. Richie barely sleeps during those nights, because he has to be up and gone before Mrs. Kaspbrak finds him in her son’s room.

He always feels less lonely, less scared.

But not really more safe.

Richie has lived at Bill’s for two weeks now. His parents haven’t come

looking for him, and Richie has managed to avoid them. The gash the bottle had gave him is healed now, only a faint scar on his hairline reminding him of it.

He dreams a lot.

Those aren't good dreams – they're plagued by the stench of alcohol, slurred words, shouted insults. A bottle smashing against his face.

He sees the clown he's almost forgotten. He sees a room, full of posters that say, *Richie Tozier, thirteen years old, missing for two weeks, if you see him, call no one because no one cares.*

He screams, but no one hears him, and invisible hands are throwing rocks at him, shouting faggot, faggot, faggot, *faggot.*

Richie wakes up with muffled scream because someone has put their hand on his mouth.

*Bill.*

"Sh-Sh-Shut up!" Bill is whispering, "Otherwise you're going to wake up my p-p-parents. Do you want them t-t-to know?"

Richie weeps silently, Bill sitting on the edge of the bed, staring at him with concerned eyes.

"I h-have n-n-nightmares too," Bill confesses. Of course. They all probably do, after last summer.

Richie is shivering so hard he can't say anything.

"D-d-do you want to c-come to m-my r-room for the r-rest of the n-night?" Bill asks, but Richie shakes his head.

"I want Eddie," the thought leaves his lips before he can stop. He feels embarrassed.

"It's 3AM, R-Richie," Bill says.

"Let me go to him," Richie says, climbing out of bed and looking around the room, trying to locate his clothes.

“I c-can’t let you g-g-go into the n-night a-a-alone,” Bill says, following Richie, who’s trying to walk forward and pull on his pants at the same time.

“I’ve done it before.”

“You’ve done it… R-Richie!”

Bill follows Richie downstairs, and outside, into the shed.

“Go back to bed, Big Bill,” Richie says, dragging his bike out. Bill follows Richie with Silver.

“N-No, Richie. I c-can’t b-b-believe you’ve been sneaking out. Knowing you, I sh-should have guessed,” Bill is muttering, more to himself than Richie.

Eddie is more than confused, when Richie *and* Bill stumble through his window at 3AM.

“What’s this?” he asks sleepily, but Richie doesn’t answer him and instead throws himself in Eddie arms.

“I had a nightmare, baby,” he says.

“It’s okay, you’re safe now,” Eddie soothes him, “Why’s Bill here?”

“You ask him,” Richie says, burrowing into Eddie’s bed.

Bill is standing in the middle of Eddie’s room, shivering in his thin pajamas.

“I d-d-didn’t want him to go a-a-alone,” Bill says.

Eddie sighs. “Really, Bill, he’s been doing this forever. Go downstairs to sleep on the living room couch, I don’t want you to catch could by going out again. But be sure to be gone before seven, that’s when my mom wakes up.”

Richie doesn’t really sleep that night, but Eddie’s arms around him give him something else to think about, than the murderous clown they’ve already defeated.

And in the morning, he doesn't go back to Bill's.

He goes home, and his mother is making dinner. When he sits at the table, her mother tries to smile at him halfheartedly.

It's a thin apology, but Richie accepts it. He always does. And when his father, comes home, he only scoffs at him, and tells him to clean up the bottles in the living room.

Bill drops by in the evening, bringing the stuff Richie left at Georgie's room.

"You s-s-sure you w-want to stay h-here?" Bill asks, eyeing Richie's mother who's struggling to open a beer can.

"Yes. One night, I would have woken up your parents with my screaming. I don't want you to get in trouble," Richie answers.

"Well, o-okay. Just remember you c-can always c-come b-b-back."

"I'll remember," Richie promises, and hugs Bill.

--

Richie and Eddie had agreed to go hang out with Mike at the farm. Richie stops by Eddie's house, so that they can go together. He raises his hand, ready to knock on the door, but he stops when he hears voices inside.

"Where are you going, Eddiebear?"

It's Mrs. Kaspbrak.

"To Mike's, Mommy," comes Eddie's annoyed voice. He's standing right behind the door, his voice is so clear, not muffled like Mrs. Kaspbrak's.

"To the farm? You must be careful, honey. The hay, your allergies…"

“My allergies are bullshit, Mother,” Eddie says.

“Is that Tozier brat going too?” Mrs. Kaspbrak’s voice has now turned from sweet to venomous.

“Yes, and his name is *Richie,”* Eddie answers.

“I don’t like him, Eddie. Why do you spend so much time with him? I like that neat Stanley more. Or Benjamin, he’s always courteous. Why Richard, Eddie?”

“Shut up, Mom. You can’t tell me who I get to be friends with. I care about Richie more than anyone else.”

Richie’s heart flutters.

“Care about?” Mrs. Kaspbrak squeak. Her voice is now clearer, and Richie realizes she’s coming closer. “What do you mean by that? Do you remember what we talked about, Eddie? About inappropriate feelings?”

“I need to go now, Mother,” Eddie says with a shaky voice. Then the door swings open, and Richie has to take a step back to prevent it from hitting him.

“Richie!” Eddie whispers sharply as he notices his boyfriend. He grabs Richie’s arm and ushers him away, before his mother spots him.

They ride their bikes in silence. Eddie is clearly upset, he keeps huffing, and his lips are shaking.

*Inappropriate feelings.*

“Does your mother know about us?” Richie asks when they reach the farm, abandoning their bikes and walking towards the barn where Mike said he’d be.

“No,” Eddie mutters. Then he surprises Richie, by continuing, “She knows something. I think she knows that I’m… That I’m…”

“Gay,” Richie whispers, and Eddie stops, glancing frantically around.

Richie takes his hand. “It’s okay,” he reassures, “Mike said we’re safe here.”

Eddie sniffles. “My mom… She thinks it’s some kind of disease, and I’ve heard… What if she sends me to some conversion therapist? I don’t want that.”

“Me neither,” Richie says, hugging Eddie fiercely, “But we’ll keep this quiet. And our friend’s have our backs, and Stan said his parents don’t mind, and Mike’s folk too. I’m sure Ben’s mom would help us too. Nothing bad will happen to you.”

“What about you?” Eddie asks.

“Nothing bad will happen to me either,” Richie says, kissing Eddie’s forehead. He continues to press kisses all over Eddie’s face, until he reaches his lips. Eddie giggles into the kiss.

“Guys!” comes Mike’s voice, “Stop making out and come and see how much the kittens have grown!”

Eddie sighs against Richie’s lips.

“We’ll be okay,” Richie says, but his thoughts are flashing to the awful slurs painted all over Derry.

“We’ll be okay,” Eddie agrees.

**Author's Note:**

hope you liked it!